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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SHENYANG 000205

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/CM, EAP/K, PRM

E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS AFTER KOREAN UNIFICATION

TAGS: PREF PREL PINR KWMN KN KS CH

SUBJECT: PRC-DPRK: NK BORDER-CROSSERS, HUMAN SMUGGLING,  
DRUG CRACKDOWN, NEW TUMEN-ONSUNG TRADE ZONE

REF: A. (A) SHENYANG 196  
1B. (B) SHENYANG 145  
1C. (C) SHENYANG 126

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL STEPHEN B. WICKMAN.

REASONS: 1.4(b)/(d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The number of North Korean border-crossers entering China in 2007 thus far looks to be roughly on par with 2005/2006 levels despite the DPRK's agricultural difficulties and natural disasters earlier this year, according to a Liaoning scholar engaged in internal, state-sponsored research on the issue. Repatriation levels look likely to bear no major fluctuations either, says the scholar, whose interviews with detained border-crossers indicate that ill-intentioned "snakeheads" in certain cases have sold unsuspecting North Korean women they have smuggled across the border into forced marriages with Chinese men. On the ground, borderland officials claim, as they have for most of the year, that they are encountering relatively few North Korean border-crossers in their jurisdictions. Official media continue to publicize, uncharacteristically, the PRC's "increasing" efforts this year to crack down on the "long-term, organized" smuggling of illegal narcotics across the PRC-DPRK border into northeast China. More positively, PRC and DPRK officials have finally selected the site for a new border-trade zone near Tumen/Onsun Gun. END SUMMARY.

MORE INTERNAL PRC BORDER-CROSSER RESEARCH

12. (C) One of a only a few scholars in Liaoning Province researching North Korean border-crosser issues on behalf of the provincial government expects the number of North Koreans entering China in 2007 to be roughly on par with 2005-2006 levels. LU Chao (strictly protect), a Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences (LASS) specialist on North Korea and PRC-DPRK border issues, told Poloff on October 18 that he suspects 2007 may yet see "slightly fewer" numbers than in 2006, notwithstanding this year's agricultural difficulties and natural disasters in the DPRK. Repatriation levels look to bear no major fluctuations either, according to Lu, a longtime Post contact and former IV grantee who has engaged in internal ("neibu"), state-sponsored research on North Korean border-crossers for at least several years now. (NOTE: In recent years, Lu has occasionally collaborated with a small coterie of

similarly-tasked counterparts at the Jilin Academy of Social Sciences (JASS) to study North Korean border-crossers and related PRC-DPRK borderland issues, according to JASS researcher ZHOU Weiping (strictly protect), one of China's leading specialists on North Korean border-crossers (ref A). Zhou told Poloff in Changchun on October 12 that the Jilin provincial government, via JASS, has actually funded some of Lu's Liaoning-based research on issues like PRC-DPRK intermarriage in the borderlands. END NOTE.)

¶3. (C) Lu's research methodology largely mirrors that of JASS' Zhou Weiping, and he too has been permitted to interview North Korean border-crossers at both of the PRC borderland detention centers--one in Dandong (across the Yalu River from Sinuiju), the other farther north along the border in the Yanbian Ethnic Korean Autonomous Prefecture's Tumen, Jilin Province--that hold North Koreans before they are ultimately repatriated to the DPRK. Lu said he has typically found "relatively few" border-crossers being held at Dandong's detention center: usually "three or four," on "rare" occasions "seven or eight." By contrast, Lu said he has usually found Tumen's to have "a lot" more--sometimes "30, 40 or 50" at a time.

¶4. (C) "Most," Lu noted, are female. Some cross the border on their own, while others arrange to have themselves smuggled out of the DPRK and into China, he explained. Lu said his interviews revealed that while most knew what lay ahead, "a portion" of the female border-crossers had been "tricked" by "snakeheads" (shetou) who smuggled the women into China, usually promising (false) employment opportunities. Once across the border, the women were sold against their will into marriages in remote rural China

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villages, Lu said. Lu noted that he had encountered some cases in which "more educated" women managed to escape, typically to ethnic Korean communities where the women were subsequently able to find work. Lu said his research suggests that some of the "snakeheads" are former North Korean border-crossers themselves that have naturalized in South Korea but have since returned to the PRC-DPRK border, where they are able to make use of their previous knowledge/connections to smuggle others for a profit.

#### BORDER OFFICIALS ON FLOWS, DPRK BORDER TIGHTENING

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¶5. (C) PRC border officials continue to claim, as they have for most of the year, that they are encountering relatively few North Korean border-crossers in their jurisdictions. CUI Zhenglong (protect), the Director of Tumen's Foreign Affairs Office (FAO), told Poloff in Yanji on October 10 that Tumen had seen "just a few" border-crossers detained over the past few months. Officials in southwestern Yanbian echoed Cui's remarks later in the month. HAN Xianji (protect), Mayor of the key Yanbian border locality of Helong, told Poloff on October 23 that the DPRK's stricter border enforcement this year lay behind the relatively low numbers his jurisdiction had seen of late.

¶6. (C) Contacts were skeptical of media reports about PRC plans to tighten its border with the DPRK in advance of/during the 2008 Olympics. Tumen FAO Director Cui--a frank contact who worked for nearly twenty years as a border guard and still maintains close ties, both formal and informal, with the local People's Armed Police (PAP) border corps--said he had not, to date, heard of any such plans, though he did not necessarily exclude the possibility. He added that the North Korean side (not the Chinese side) was taking additional measures to further tighten its side of the border during the PRC's 17th Party Congress, lest any sort of border incident cause a well-publicized embarrassment to the DPRK. LASS' Lu Chao echoed Cui's comments, noting also that he has been tasked by the Liaoning government to study Olympic security measures for

the province, which will host some soccer events in Shenyang.

CRACKDOWN ON NORTH KOREAN NARCOTICS CONTINUES

¶7. (SBU) The putative tightening of the North Korean side of the PRC-DPRK border seems to have done little to staunch appreciably the flow of illegal narcotics from the DPRK into northeast China, which a range of contacts describe as an ongoing source of heartburn in heavier-hit Jilin and Liaoning provinces. Official media continue to take the unusual step of openly publicizing the PRC's "increasing" efforts this year to crack down on what they describe as the "long-term, organized" smuggling of drugs--particularly methamphetamines--across the PRC-DPRK border into northeast China.

¶8. (U) In Jilin, state media reported last month that the province's border guard corps had made at least 16 major busts of transnational drug smugglers in 2007, netting 80 suspects and 12.5 kilograms of seizures, primarily in Yanbian and the Baishan area, both bordering the DPRK. Liaoning authorities earlier this month publicized a late-August 2007 seizure of a half-kilogram of methamphetamines smuggled in from a "certain country outside China's borders": smugglers cleared customs in Dandong and arranged for the transport of the narcotics all the way to Shenyang before being arrested by police. At least one official PRC press report has explicitly linked several busts this year with the arrest of a group of ROK, DPRK and Chinese nationals allegedly involved in smuggling North Koreans through third countries into the ROK.

PROGRESS ON NEW PRC-DPRK TRADE SITE?

¶9. (C) After major North Korean delays, about which PRC officials in Tumen have long groused (e.g., refs B and C), Pyongyang last month finally approved plans for a barter-trade zone near Tumen/Onsung County, to be built using

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Chinese funds. Tumen Vice Mayor YAN Zhihong (strictly protect) and Tumen FAO Director Cui told Poloff on October 10 that both sides this month finally identified the site for what will be known as the Tumen-Onsung County Commodity Exchange Market ("Wuzi Jiaoliu Shichang"). The site, upstream from Tumen's railroad port to Namyang, DPRK, was selected because it is far enough removed from residential areas but still close enough to be convenient for traders. If opened, it will be the first such market operating along the PRC-DPRK border, according to Cui, who was about to return once again to the DPRK to continue negotiating the details of what still remains but a "general framework" for the market's activities.

¶10. (C) Farther away from the border, trade officials in Jilin's provincial capital of Changchun sounded less upbeat when queried about the zone. On October 12, GUO Qinghong (protect), Director of the Jilin government's Port Office, and ZHENG Wei, Vice Director of the Jilin Bureau of Commerce's Foreign Trade Division, acknowledged the ongoing negotiations, but they pointed to Jilin's border-trade zone with Russia as a venture likely to be more lucrative by comparison. Formal Jilin-DPRK trade reached only USD 220 million last year--below Jilin's target--and is expected to grow to USD 250-260 million in 2007, according to CHENG Ke (protect), a deputy head of Jilin Province's Bureau of Commerce. But Cheng and his colleagues seemed skeptical that the value of goods exchanged at the planned Tumen/Onsung site, if ever operational, would amount to any significant fraction of overall formal Jilin-DPRK trade.

WICKMAN